

THE LADOC 'KEYHOLE' SERIES

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School of Theology at Claremont



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Social and Religious Problems

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**EL SALVADOR II**  
**ARCHBISHOP**  
**ROMERO**  
**and the**  
**UNITED**  
**STATES**

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## INTRODUCTION

"A sign of the universal charity of the church...a sign of respect and communion" is about all the Puebla document has to say on the matter of the ties among the various particular or national churches; how the Church in Britain or France or the U.S. relates to the church in Bolivia or Chile or Brazil. The citation is basically an expression of gratitude to the "sister churches in Europe and North America" for their "generous aid in personnel and economic resources." (Puebla #103)

For some, in Latin America as in the exterior, this may pretty well define the relationship. But for many bishops, for bishops like Oscar Romero and the thousand other Latin American church-people who have suffered persecution for their faith in the last decade, the ties with the church in other countries have been of critical importance. For it is in those other countries and especially the United States where decisions are made that affect, so often adversely affect, the lives of the people of Latin America.

The El Salvador-U.S. relationship offers a particularly vivid example of this "universal charity of the church" extending well beyond money and missionaries. Because the United States has long sought to control the flow of events in El Salvador and never more explicitly than in the period following the officers' coup of October 15, 1979, the Salvadorean church has drawn even closer to its counterpart to the North.

Many parts of the church of El Salvador and of the United States have come to know and work with and learn from and depend upon each other over the last two years. This has been particularly true among the sons of Ignatius as the Jesuits of both countries have placed their considerable resources of talent and commitment at the service of one another and of the suffering people. It is true also of many other religious congregations and dioceses and grass-roots Christian communities in this country for whom the martyrs of El Salvador, from Rutilio Grande to Oscar Romero, constitute one of the greatest hopes for the whole church.

This Keyhole seeks to illustrate that special relationship of solidarity and mutual support between the two particular churches, seen principally in the relationship between the bishops' conference in this country and the local church whose pastor was the beloved Oscar Arnulfo Romero.

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*Archbishop Oscar Romero delivered what was to be his last Sunday homily on March 23, 1980, the day before he was killed by a marksman's bullet while celebrating Mass in a small hospital chapel. His homily, a reflection on the day's readings, was both eloquent and simple and linked to the realities of El Salvador.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today we welcome visitors of the ecumenical delegation from the United States. They are here in the cause of human rights and by their presence at our celebration of Word and Eucharist, we sense the solidarity we share with our North American neighbors. We are grateful to you.

We also greet the personnel from YSAX which is functioning again. We know the risk involved by our poor station for being the vehicle of truth and justice. But it is risk that must be taken for the sake of the people who depend on it. I likewise am happy this morning for the collaboration of Radio News of the Continent, which as on past Sundays, transmits our voice to many parts of Latin America.

Demetrio Olaziregui, journalist, is also here and he told us of the bomb explosion at the station in Costa Rica. It partially destroyed the building but the radio continues to operate and gives us this marvelous service. Our homilies continue to be transmitted to Venezuela, Colombia and even Brazil. The station receives hundreds of letters stating that we are heard clearly in Honduras, Nicaragua and many places in El Salvador.

#### LENT

I thank God that a message which is no more than a modest reflection on the Word reaches so many people to tell them that all of Lent is a preparation for our Easter, an Easter which is a shout of victory. No one can extinguish the life that Christ has given us. Not

death, nor all the signs of hatred and death against Him and against His Church, can overcome it! Christ is Victor!

Christ will reign in an Easter of unending resurrection but first we must accompany Him in Lent, in a Holy Week which is cross, sacrifice and martyrdom. Lent is a call to celebrate our redemption in this complexity of cross and victory. Our people qualify to answer that call because everything around them speaks of the cross. However all who have Christian faith and hope know that after this Calvary of El Salvador, there will be our Easter, our resurrection. This is the hope for all Christian people.

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LENTEN MESSAGE: GOD'S DESIGN FOR TOTAL LIBERATION

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During Lent I have tried to discover in the Sunday readings, God's plan to save nations and peoples. As diverse historical projects emerge for our people, we believe that the one that best reflects the plan of God will be victorious. And this is the mission of the Church. In the light of the Divine Word that reveals the designs of God for the good of the people, we have the duty, dear brothers and sisters, to see how the plan of God is being reflected or rejected in our midst. Let no one be disturbed that we illumine the social, political and economic truths by the light of the words that are read at Mass. For us not to do so, would be unchristian. This is how Christ enters our midst so that the light that He brings from the Father enlivens people and nations.

Some are shocked by this and accuse us of diverging from the Gospel to speak politics. I reject this accusation. I am attempting to indicate all that Vatican II, the meetings of Medellin and Puebla have told us to do. It was never meant to remain on paper for theoretical study. No, we must live it and transfer it into the preaching of the Gospel to our people. That is why I ask

the Lord during the whole week as I gather up the cry of the people and the ache of crime and the ignominy of violence, that He give me the suitable words to console, to denounce, to call for repentance. Even though I may continue to be just a voice crying in the wilderness, I know that the Church is making the effort to fulfill its mission.

We can synthesize the Sunday Lenten sermons with regard to the plan of God in these words: Christ is the way. We meet Him fasting and overcoming temptations in the desert. Christ is also our goal so He is presented to us as transfigured, beckoning us to that goal to which all are called. We likewise learn that God asks us to collaborate in our own salvation. We need conversion and reconciliation. Examples like the barren fig tree, the prodigal son, the adulteress who repents and is forgiven are invitations from God. There is no sin that remains unforgiven, there is no enmity that cannot be reconciled when there is conversion and a sincere return to the Lord. That is the voice of Lent!

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#### FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PLAN IN HISTORY

The readings of Lent tell us how God makes the history of people into their history of salvation. Insofar as people reflect the plan of God in their lives, they are being saved. At the beginning of Lent we read the history of Israel. We see how God punishes their infidelities and sins. But we hear the promise of God's salvation. We travel with Moses through the desert; with Joshua we celebrate the first passover in the Promised Land. In today's reading we are invited to a second exodus, the return from Babylon.

Every nation constructs its history. Each is different but there is a common element: the group of faithful ones, the group of the people of God, the group that follows Christ. This morning we have a valuable example. Followers of Christ in the United States have come to

share with the followers of Christ here in El Salvador. In the great nation of the north they are the voice of the Gospel against the injustices of that society. They come to give us courage so that we, the people of God here in El Salvador, may bravely denounce the injustices of our own society.

In the light of today's Scripture readings, I am going to title my sermon: The Church, a service of personal, communitarian and transcendent liberation. These three categories mark the three ideas of the homily today. 1) The dignity of the person must be respected. 2) Salvation is for the people as a whole. 3) The definitive and true dimension of liberation is its transcendence

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#### DIGNITY OF THE PERSON IS THE FIRST TASK OF LIBERATION

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The Gospel gives us the adulteress before Christ. I find no more beautiful example of Jesus saving human dignity than this sinless Jesus face to face with an adulteress. She is humiliated because she has been caught in adultery and her captors demand that she be stoned. Jesus bends to the earth and the accusers having drifted away, He asks the woman, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Sir." "Nor do I condemn you. But from now on, avoid this sin." Strong but tender and before else respect for human dignity. This was a legal problem in Jesus' time. In Deuteronomy any woman caught in adultery was condemned to die. The learned ones discussed whether it should be by stoning or by strangulation. They questioned Jesus: "What do you say?" In contemporary terms, "How shall we kill her?" With greater tolerance than the bad will of those who presented the dilemma, Jesus began tracing on the ground. Jesus answers, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone at her."

Jesus has touched their conscience. In looking at their conscience, they saw their own sin. The woman's dignity is saved. God does not condone sin but He does save the dignity of a woman overcome by sin. He loves,



He has come to save sinners and here we have an example. To convert her is much better than to condemn her. Law must serve human dignity and not consist of false legalities which so often trample human integrity.

Personal sin is the root of great social sin. We must be very clear on this, beloved brothers and sisters, because today it is very easy, as it was for the witnesses against the adulteress, to point out and beg justice for others. But how few cast a glance at their own conscience! How easy it is to denounce structural injustice, institutionalized violence, social sin! It is true, this sin is everywhere, but where are the roots of this social sin? In the heart of every human being.

Present-day society is a sort of an anonymous world in which no one is willing to admit guilt and everyone is responsible for what is happening, but it is anonymous. We are all sinners and all of us have contributed to this massive crime and violence in our country.

Salvation begins with the human person, with human dignity, with saving every person from sin. And in Lent this is God's call, be converted! No two sinners are alike. Each one has committed his or her own shameful deeds and yet we want to cast our guilt on the other and hide our own sin. I must take off my mask. I too am one of them and I need to beg God's pardon because I have offended God and society. This is the call of Christ: before all else, the human person!

How beautiful is the expression of that woman upon finding herself pardoned and understood: "No one, Sir. No one has condemned me." Then neither do I, I who could give that truly condemning word, neither do I condemn, but be careful, do not sin again. Do not sin again!

What a wonderful chapter on the promotion of woman. If woman has achieved heights similar to those of man, much of this is due to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the time of Christ, people were shocked that he should speak with a Samaritan woman, because woman was considered unworthy to speak with a man. Jesus shows that

we are all equal. There is neither Jew nor Greek, man or woman, all are God's children. Christ is the one who has emphasized the greatness of woman and the heights to which she is capable with those feminine gifts so often overlooked, unappreciated by male chauvinism.

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#### THE PERSON OF THE ACCUSERS

The witnesses too have understood that redemption begins with human dignity and prior to being judges who administer justice, they must be honest men who give sentence with a clear conscience. We must focus on Jesus' attitude in this Gospel. What we must learn is a delicacy with reference to the person, however sinful that person may be. This is what distinguishes him as the Son of God. He does not condemn, rather he pardons. He is strong in rejecting the sin but He knows how to condemn the sin and save the sinner. He does not subordinate the human person to the law. And this is very important in our times. He said: "The human person was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for humanity."

Let us not cite our country's constitution to defend our own personal selfishness, trying to use it for our own interests when it has been trampled upon everywhere. The law is for the benefit of the human person, not the person for the law. Jesus is the source of peace because He has given human dignity its rightful place. We must repent and return to Jesus. This is the deepest joy that a human being can have.

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#### PUEBLA AND THE HUMAN PERSON

There are three theological guidelines at Puebla: the truth about Christ, the truth about the Church, and the truth about humanity. In reference to the human person, we bishops of Latin America signed a commitment at Puebla. We spoke about the false earthly visions that are based on selfishness, those visions in marxist ideologies which

make a person a cog in the machinery. Likewise those who in the interests of national security turn people into servants of the state, as if the state were lord and the people servants when it is the reverse.

At Puebla we bishops said:

*"We profess then, that every man and every woman (Gal. 5:13-24), however insignificant they may seem, possesses an inviolable nobility that they themselves and others must respect, and ensure respect for, without any conditions attached; that every human life deserves to be dignified in itself, in whatever circumstances; that all human life together must be grounded on the common good, which lies in the ever more fraternal realization of the common dignity of all. And this requires that none be used as instruments for the benefit of others, and that all be willing even to sacrifice private benefits. (317)*

This is what we have learned from Christ in His Gospel, that above all, the human person must be saved and that personal sin is the first thing we must try to straighten out. Our personal individual relationship with God sets the stage for everything else. False liberators are those who are slaves to sin and therefore many times are cruel, neither loving nor respecting others.

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#### GOD WANTS TO SAVE ALL THE PEOPLE

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The second idea passes from the individual to the communitarian. This is put beautifully in today's readings. We see how God desires to save people as a people. It is the whole population that God wants to save.

The first reading from the famous song of Isaiah, presents God speaking with a people. It is the dialogue of God with a collective personality. God speaks with a people and to that people. God makes them His people to whom He will make promises and revelations that will serve for all peoples. Difference between "people of god" and "people" in general. For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, pay careful attention to the Old Testament

which contains messages that pertain to the People of God and others that refer to the people in general. Many times the prophets reproached Israel for boasting about being the sons of Abraham instead of believing and obeying God. The believers, a smaller number, were the true people of God. There were also the vaster numbers called gentiles. That nucleus of believers, the collective entity with whom God speaks, continues through Christ to all Christians. In every country there is a group. This morning we have an example of this. In the United States there is also a group of Christians that is not representative of the whole United States, just as here in El Salvador there is a group of the Church that does not encompass all of El Salvador.

When I as pastor address the people of God, I don't pretend to be master of El Salvador but rather servant of the archdiocese. I speak to those that want to serve Christ and who recognize the bishop as the teacher who speaks to them in the name of Christ. From them I expect respect and obedience. With them I feel so united that it doesn't bother me that those who are not of the church, although they may be included in it, criticize me, murmur against me, pick me apart. They no longer belong to the people of God. Even though they may be baptized and come to Mass, if they are not in accord with the exacting tenets of the Gospel and in solidarity with the applications of our pastoral thrust, we tell them not to toy with that sacred name, the people. Our call is to the people of God, to the nucleus of Salvadorans that believe in Christ and wish to follow Him faithfully, who are nourished by His life, His sacraments and His pastors.

This people of God exists throughout history. Today's reading puts it succinctly. You glorify the first exodus when I took you out of Egypt, when you crossed the desert. What many wonders were made on that journey with Moses! But do not glory any longer in that past. That has become history. I make all things new.

It is God who makes things new; it is God that works through history.

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## THE NEW EXODUS

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The second exodus is from exile in Babylon. The desert through which they will pass will flower like a garden, the waters will gush forth, symbolizing God's pardon. It is a people reconciled with God on the way to Jerusalem. It is not quite like the slavery of Egypt but rather an exile and that is how it will continue throughout history.

Today El Salvador is living its exodus. Today we too are passing through a desert where anguish and pain and dead bodies devastate us. Where many suffer the temptation of those who walked with Moses and then wanted to turn back. They refused to collaborate. God desires to save the people by making a new history. History does not repeat itself, despite the saying. Certain things are apparently repetitious. But what is not repeated are the circumstances and the opportunities. How nebulous is our history, how it varies from day to day! If one leaves El Salvador for a week, it seems that history has been made. Let us not try to judge things as they once were judged. The one thing necessary is to be firmly anchored in faith in Jesus Christ, God of history. That does not change, but He can change history: "I make all things new."

Therefore the Christian cannot rely on traditions that no longer sustain themselves. He must apply that eternal tradition of Christ to the present realities. We have to ask God for the grace to adapt ourselves, without betraying our faith, to understand the present times. This is especially true for those of us who were formed in earlier times and in other systems. God makes anew and for that reason he corrected the Israelities who were content with the first exodus instead of becoming aware that God was already doing wonders in a second exodus.

God sustains history. Insofar as historical projects attempt to reflect the eternal plan of God, in that measure they reflect the Kingdom of God and this is the work of the Church. Therefore the people of God (Church) in history are not tied to any social system, to any political organization, to any party. The Church is the eternal pilgrim of history and in any given historical moment, she indicates what the kingdom of God is and what it is not. She is the servant of the Kingdom of God.

The task of Christians is to be filled with the Kingdom of God while working on the projects of history. It is good to be organized in popular organizations; it is all right to form political parties; it is fine to be in government, if you are a Christian that reflects the Kingdom of God and tries to establish it where you are working and that you do not succumb to the ambitions of the world. This is the great duty of the people of today. My dear Christians, I have always told you and I repeat once again, the leaders who will truly liberate our people must come from the people of God.

Whatever historical plan is not based on the dignity of the human person, the love of God, and the Kingdom of God, will be a short-lived project. The one that best reflects the eternal design of God will become stable and be for the common good of all people. That is why you should be grateful to the Church, dear political brothers and sisters, and not try to manipulate her to say what you want but rather say what the Church teaches. The Church does not have interests of her own. I do not have ambition for power and therefore I am free to tell "the powers" what is good and what is bad. I also tell any political group what is good and what is bad. This is my duty.

This freedom of the Church (which includes bishops and priests, laity, religious, Catholic schools) should help us to draw up criteria. We should not be disunited, appear dispersed. Many times it seems that we are inhibited by the popular organizations. We wish to please



them rather than God. I don't have to lie to anyone about anything. This is not arrogance but the grateful humility of one who has received from God a revelation to communicate to the rest.

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#### THE TRANSCENDENCE OF LIBERATION, ITS TRUE AND DEFINITIVE DIMENSION.

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We draw a third thought from today's readings. God's plan for liberating His people is transcendent. It is an idea that I repeat perhaps too often. We run the risk of wanting immediate solutions to present situations. Quick answers are patches but not necessarily true solutions. The true solution must fit into the definitive plan of God. Every solution we seek, whether it is better land distribution, fairer administration and distribution of wealth in El Salvador, or a political organization structured for the common good, all must be sought within the context of definitive liberation.

Recently someone offered me this schema. A politician looks at temporal problems - money, land, things - and can be content with solving them. But the person who has faith in God and tries to see it from God's point of view, sees that politicians ought to analyze from God's perspective. For example in today's readings from the Bible we recognize that God is the protagonist of history. Our starting point is redemption from sin. We must not set aside Christ who is the way and the goal of true liberation. God takes the initiative "The people whom I formed," God says in the first reading. God speaks to Israel, "I am making history for you."

How wonderful is the moment when we understand that we are mere instruments of God, that we live only as long as God wants us to live, we can do only as much as God enables us to do, we are only as intelligent as He would have us be. To place all these limitations in God's hands, to recognize that without God we can do nothing, is to become aware of the transcendent meaning of this

*to accept  
human mutations  
+ commend the  
project to God*

time in El Salvador. It means to be very united with God -- and there are people like this working for liberation.

The other day we were talking about a problem in a shelter. Do not confuse shelter with military base. The shelter is a refuge for those who come with fear and in fright and wish to hide. "Oh, but there are many organizations. We can't just sit around, we have to work." Then go and work. Find a military post where you can do it. The shelter is a place where the sick also work -- that father with his ailing wife and his children who could do nothing. They wanted to send them to occupy a church. No, let her offer her pain, let him offer his sickness. This has value. When we lose sight of the transcendence of the struggle, everything consists in "doing things"! which may even be erroneous! Would that all those who work today for the liberation of the people knew that without God we can do nothing and that with God even the most simple task done with good will is a worthwhile contribution.

To discover God in the historical event is to become aware of transcendence. That is why those who work for the liberation of people, I repeat, must not lose sight of the transcendent dimension.

Secondly, we must be mindful that liberation must free us from sin. All evils have a common root which is sin. Divisions arise because the human heart contains egoism, envy, idolatry. This is what must be purified. Why does slavery exist? Margination? Illiteracy? Diseases? Why do the people mourn? They all point to the existence of sin. Liberation that transcends lifts us out of sin. The Church always preaches: repent of your your personal sin. Brothers and sisters, I want to convince you of the importance of your intimate relations with God. Without God there can be no true concept of liberation. *Very different view!*

~~The transcendent aspect demands deep faith in Jesus Christ.~~ Today's second reading is from St. Paul, that

man who did not know Christ and therefore believed that Christ and his followers were traitors to Judaism. He wished to drag them in, chained, and do away with that sect. But when Christ reveals Himself to Paul, he is converted and writes: "I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ."

There are many who want justice, an earthly justice. They do not go beyond it. It is not this justice but the justice which comes from faith in Christ that saves me, says St. Paul. "I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his suffering by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead." Do you see how life recovers all its meaning? Suffering becomes a communion with Christ, the Christ that suffers, and death is a communion with the death that redeemed the world. Who can feel worthless before this treasure that one finds in Christ? ...that gives meaning to sickness, to pain, to oppression, to torture, to marginalization? No one is conquered, no one -- even though they crush one with oppression and repression. Whoever believes in Christ knows that he is victor and that the definitive victory will be that of truth and justice. St. Paul goes on to say: "I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead. My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me -- life on high in Christ Jesus. This is transcendence, the goal which is definitive joy for everyone.

Brothers and sisters, this is the liberation that our Church must live and preach. We have learned about it in the Word of God spoken to us during Lent. Now as we enter Holy Week may we become a stronger Church, a stronger People of God. I speak now to my beloved priests, to the religious congregations, to the Christian

communities, to all we call Church, the people of God, so that from this gathering of believers, we may have the kind of strength that God gave to Israel to light the way for other peoples, to illumine and reject whatever is not good and to further what is good. At this point in my homily, I pause to talk about the task of the Church.

*(The Archbishop interpolates with references to Holy Week services. He refers again to the presence of "our Christian brothers and sisters from North America" who attest that there are many Christian groups in solidarity with the letter sent to President Carter regarding military aid. He quotes an article by Mr. Murat Williams, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador during President Rivera's time, who corroborates from his experience that this kind of aid simply intensifies military repression.)*

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#### EVENTS OF THE WEEK

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In Aguilares we celebrated the third anniversary of Fr. Rutilio Grande's assassination. It is obvious that the repression is having its effect. There were few people present; there is much fear. There are many martyrs here. In Tejutla we celebrated the village feastday. There they told me of a terrible violation of human rights. Around midnight on March 7 a truck filled with men, some in civilian dress and others in uniform, broke into homes and dragged people out with blows and kicks. They raped four young women, beat their parents and threatened them if they reported it. In a community of Cuscatlan in Candelaria the National Guard captured a young reservist, Emilio Mejia. He was returned to his village, San Jose La Ceiba, and murdered. His mother Doña Carmen retrieved his body and buried it. Then the National Guard admitted it was a mistake, that they were looking for another person with the same name. They found the second Emilio Mejia and after maltreating him in front of his wife, took him away. The next day she found him about two blocks away, beheaded. Don Jose Cupertino and his daughters Carmen Alvarado and Maria Josefa

Alvarado were kidnapped from their home in San Miguel Nance Verde and were found dead in the coffee fields. Notice that all the victims were captured without resistance while peacefully at home.

When our Chancery denounced the raid on the Belgian priests' rectory in Zacamil, the Minister of Defence replied: "As for the raid on the house mentioned, I state as follows: 1) that they had no kind of sign to identify it as a priests' lodging 2) another house in the same neighborhood was also raided because of information which demanded investigation; we also had information regarding the priests 3) the raid in the priests' house ceased as soon as it was determined that there was no cause for suspicion 4) there is a possibility that persons came in after the raid and left the impression that the National Guard's raid was a violent one." I won't omit mentioning that when the National Guard was questioned about the incident, they did not deny the raid. In fact the Ministry ordered them to be more circumspect and respect special houses and to consult before acting.

*(Archbishop Romero interrupts his narrative to relate some heartening pastoral activities in the surrounding countryside. He again stresses that he is following the thrust of Vatican II, Medellin and Puebla. He pays tribute to Archbishop Chavez for a "precious inheritance.")*

I want to give you two clarifications of recent happenings. The first refers to the policeman tortured in the cathedral. On March 21 members of FAPU begged the Chancery to help them with the burial of 17 bodies that were in the cathedral because they feared violence on the way to the cemetery. The Chancery agreed to get the necessary permission but FAPU and BPR could not agree on some points especially when they were told they could not make it a protest demonstration. While this was being negotiated, the Director of the National Police asked the Chancery to intervene in the kidnapping by people in the cathedral of Corporal Miguel Angel Zuniga. The Chancery cooperated and a commission went to the hospital to

interview the wounded policeman. We do not approve the cruel tortures exerted on him (from which he will recover.) The human person must always be fully respected.

The second case I wish to explain is the following. The Church has opened the doors of four places on its property to protect refugees who have fled from their homes in fear of the violence that is lashing the countryside. One of the Church's obligations is to succor those in need, irrespective of their creed, politics or beliefs. In this specific case the Church has turned over these four places for refuge but they are not centers of political indoctrination nor are they military training camps. Instead of protecting people, this would place them in additional danger. For this reason I have asked the popular organizations to respect the strict function of the shelters. I have advised the military authorities of this. This humanitarian work is being carried out by Caritas, the Archbishopric's official agency for service. Aside from this, the Church does not recognize any other agency as representative of its official charitable activities. Caritas is a member of CEAH, the ecumenical Committee for Humanitarian Aid. CEAH consists of organizations that respond to social needs. These latter do not represent the Catholic Church. If the Archbishopric has not achieved all the desired results, it has not been due to inertia but rather to the lack of necessary understanding and collaboration.

Now I invite you to join me in examining some of the realities of a tremendously tragic week. I did not have this data previously so this goes back to March 15. A very distressing military operation took place in the rural provinces of La Laguna, Plan de Ocotes and El Rosario resulting in great tragedy. Many homes were burned, others ransacked and many people died. In La Laguna alone, they killed Ernesto Navas and Aduelia Mejia and their three children as well as 11 other peasants. We have no names, just statistics for Plan de Ocotes:



4 peasants and two children. In El Rosario 3 more peasants. A week ago on Sunday, in Arcatao, three persons were executed by ORDEN.

March 17 was a terribly violent day. Bombs exploded in the capital and in the countryside. At the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture, the damages were very extensive. The National University was surrounded by the military in the early morning hours and remained closed until seven at night. Machine-gun bursts were heard all day long. The Archbishopric interceded for protection for the people inside the university.

Eighteen people died at the Colima Hacienda, 15 of them peasants. The hacienda administrator and a storage overseer also died. The Armed Forces assert that it was a confrontation and TV gave a report on it. All told about 50 persons died on March 17, in the capital and in the outskirts.

Amnesty International released a statement describing the repression of peasants, especially in the Chalatenango area. The government denies it. I just received a cable from AI confirming that El Salvador exceeds other countries in human rights violations. A two-week fact-finding tour confirmed that 83 political murders had occurred between March 10 and 14th. AI recently accused the Salvadoran government of 600 killings. In turn the government defended itself, claiming that the 600 had been killed in armed confrontations between army troops and guerrillas. AI representative Fuentes verified tortures before death. The bodies of the victims are usually found with their thumbs tied to their backs. Chemicals were applied to bodies to prevent identification to avoid international denunciations. Nevertheless relatives unearthed the bodies to identify them. The Army seeks to disband the popular organizations by killing their urban and rural leaders.

This confirms what I have reported about this awful week.

I would like to explore what may have been the cause of the violence on the 17th: the strike called by the Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses. Its goal was to denounce the repression, and as I said last Sunday, it was a legitimate goal since it denounced something intolerable. However the strike also had a political goal which was to show that rather than intimidating the popular organizations, repression was strengthening them. Its purpose was also to reject the incumbent government's position since it requires violent repression to implement its reforms. For various reasons these reforms are not acceptable to the organizations.

The state of siege and the lack of information from official courses and most of the media prevent us from ascertaining the scope of the national strike. Foreign radio stations speak of 70% success, which if true, would be a triumph. The strength of the Coordinating Committee is strong among workers, not only in the country side but also in the factories and in the city. It is possible that some mistakes were made. Nevertheless it seems that the strike was a step forward in the people's struggle and indicated that the Left can paralyze the economy of the country. The government's response to the strike was harsh: the patrols, the shooting at the University, and above all by the number of deaths. At least ten workers were killed in the striking factories by the security corps and three workers from the mayor's office were found dead after arrest by the rural police. This information came from the Mayor's office itself.

These deaths were followed by many others, some say more than 140. The labor strike gave rise to combats in the countryside. The tactical suitability of these operations may be questioned but this did not justify the government's repression.

The Coordinating Committee certainly has its faults and has a long way to go toward becoming a coherent alternative of revolutionary democratic power. Let us hope that they will study, evaluate and develop an expression

that emerges from the people so that when they blunder they will not be repudiated by that same people. It is hoped that they will mature and come to understand what the people really want. These flaws exist in them not because they are subversives, hoodlums or social outcasts. The flaws exist because they are not permitted normal political development. They are persecuted, massacred and always curtailed in their labor activities, organizational work and in their efforts to broaden their relations with other democratic groups. This will make them despair and radicalize. They will launch revolutionary activities and combative struggle. The least that can be said is that our country is going through a pre-revolutionary stage. The question is how to come out of this critical stage with a minimum of violence. The main responsibility lies with the civilian and especially the military rulers. Let us hope that they will not be blinded by what they are doing regarding land reform. It may be a ruse that will block their view of the problem in its entirety.

I have here a clipping about the Pope. He cites the number of victims in Italy and in Rome especially. That means that if the Pope were in my place he would not only point to the 10 cruel killings in Italy but he would linger here as we are doing in recounting the day-to-day murders. (The Archbishop continues a day-by-day account giving details of places and names of persons killed.)

We have a declaration from the peasant Agustin Sanchez who survived arrest and torture. He testified before a notary and witnesses that he was arrested on the hacienda El Cauca while working in the Office of the Salvadoran Communal Union. He was tortured for four days without food or water, with constant beatings and asphyxiation until March 19 when together with two companions, he was shot in the head. The bullet destroyed his right cheekbone and eye but he survived. He was found on the road and a trustworthy person brought him to the capital. He was unable to sign the testimony

because his hands had been destroyed by torture. Reliable persons attested to this account and there is a photographic document that reveals the state in which they found this man.

Just before Mass this morning I was given confirmation of the murder of 25 campesinos in San Pablo Tacachico. On Friday the 21st a military operation was carried out in Santa Ana and surrounding villages. They had a hit list of victims. They spread terror by registering all people whom they passed in buses or on foot. They entered villages in tanks sowing terror among the inhabitants. They robbed radios and money and burned the house and belongings of Rosalio Cruz. They sought out the names on their list, murdering them, and carried off some of the women and men.

One final note. Yesterday afternoon, the Jesuit Jose Simeon Canas University was attacked. A combat unit along with the National Police came at 1:15 p.m., entering the campus shooting randomly. Manuel Orantes Guillen, a student who was studying was killed. It is said that several students have disappeared. Their relatives and the UCA have protested the raid of a campus whose autonomy should have been respected. What they have not done at the National University, no doubt out of fear, they have done at UCA (Central American University.) We expect to give more details about the serious breach of legality in our country.

Dear brothers and sisters, it would be interesting to analyze the significance of these months of a new government that wanted to rectify such horrible situations. If it aims to deprive the people of their leaders and obstruct the process that the people want, it will not succeed. Without roots in the people, no government can be effective. And even less so when it tries to impose things by bloodshed and grief.

I would like to appeal in a special way to the men of the Army and particularly to the troops of the National Guard, the Police and the garrisons. Brothers,

you belong to our people. You are killing your own brother peasants. The law of God should prevail over an order to kill. God says: THOU SHALT NOT KILL. No soldier is obliged to obey an order counter to the law of God. No one has to comply with an immoral law. It is high time that you recover your conscience and obey its dictates rather than a sinful command. The Church, defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of the dignity of the human person, cannot remain silent before so much abomination.

We want the government to seriously consider that reforms serve no purpose if they are stained with so much blood. Therefore, in the name of God and in the name of this long-suffering people whose laments cry to heaven, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: cease the repression!

The Church preaches your liberation just as we studied it today in the Scripture readings. It is a liberation that above all, respects human dignity, the common good of the people, transcends everything and from God alone derives its hope and its strength.

Let us now proclaim our act of faith in that truth.

Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, president of the (U.S.) National Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued the following statement on March 25. He said that the posture and policies of our nation directly influence the daily life of the poor in El Salvador.

Archbishop Oscar Romero was a vigorous supporter of the rights of the poor. He was critical of leftist and rightist terrorist elements and pleaded for reconciliation.

The assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador is a tragedy and an outrage. Although it is impossible at this time to fix the precise blame for this killing, it is clear that the archbishop's death is part of a major social conflict in which he has consistently stood as a voice for the poor and the oppressed who form the vast majority of the Salvadoran people. His death, like his life gave witness to Christ--through fulfillment of the gospel mandate to serve the poor.

We in the United States tend to look at events in a country like El Salvador in a detached way, as if we were unrelated to them. In fact, however, the posture and policies of our nation directly influence the daily life of the poor in El Salvador. Archbishop Romero called attention to this himself in his prophetic letter to President Carter on February 17. In a direct personal plea to the president, the archbishop requested that no more military assistance be given to the El Salvadoran government. As yet the plea has not been heeded. There could be no more fitting tribute to the heroic life of this holy man than the fact that as a nation we would follow his advice.

I extend to the people of El Salvador and to our brother bishops there, our promise of prayers for the repose of the soul of Archbishop Romero and for a future of justice and peace for all the people of El Salvador.



*On March 29, 1980 Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, O.P. preached the following homily at the memorial Mass of the Resurrection for Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, El Salvador, at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, D.C.*

We gather at the edge of the holiest week in the Christian liturgical year to commemorate the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador. We gather in a spirit of solidarity with the church and the people of El Salvador. We gather in sorrow, but also in thanksgiving and in hope, for Holy Week teaches us to see all of life and death in light of the Paschal Mystery, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For the community of faith, Holy Week is the commemoration of how life triumphs over death, and how the hope of Easter Sunday arises from the suffering of Good Friday. It is also the lesson of Jesus the Suffering Servant who "emptied himself" (Phil. 2:7) so that the world might "have life and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10). It is in the context of these themes that we come together in faith and hope to celebrate and contemplate the life and death of Archbishop Romero.

The liturgy of these last days of Lent and particularly of Holy Week is dominated by the Old Testament prophets and by the impending passion of Jesus. Both themes, the example of the prophets and death of Jesus have been powerfully symbolized for us by the death of Archbishop Romero. In the liturgy yesterday we heard the prophet Jeremiah, who was faced with the kind of danger and continuing threat to his life which has stalked Oscar Romero for months, say: "the Lord is with me like a mighty champion; my persecutors will stumble they will not triumph...praise the Lord. For he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked (Jer. 20:11; 13). On Thursday we heard Jesus, in the Gospel of John, tell the hostile crowds: "The fact

is, you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God." (Jn. 8:40).

Archbishop Oscar Romero, like the prophets and like Jesus, spoke the truth and paid the prophet's price with the offering of his life. Like Jesus he testified to the validity of his words by the quality of his deeds, and his testimony in word and deed was faithful until the moment when, like Jesus in the Gospel today, he offered his life for his people. Because the Archbishop's testimony was so evidently that of "the just man" of which the Book of Wisdom speaks, because he was so clearly in the tradition of Jeremiah and Jesus, his words demand our attention: the words he spoke to his countrymen and the words he spoke to us as American citizens.

In the complex, tragic and violent struggle for justice in El Salvador, the Archbishop exemplified what the Latin American bishops at Puebla called "a preferential option for the poor." As a pastor he spoke the truth to all in his society, but he spoke with and for the poor.

In the midst of violence he spoke a profound truth about peace when he said: "True peace can only be accomplished through the difficult and arduous but urgent task to distribute more equitably the wealth of the country among all Salvadoreans."

In the midst of vast disparities of wealth and prosperity he spoke the truth about justice to the oligarchy: "Remember that Puebla's call for a preference for the poor is not demagoguery to breed class distinctions or class struggle; it is a call on all social classes to make the problem of the poor their own."

In the context of his country and at this moment in El Salvador's history these statements, and countless others like them, were not only Gospel truths but extraordinarily courageous acts. As one American reporter commented on the Archbishop's sermons to a packed Cathedral each Sunday, he spoke to issues "in terms no politician in the country would dare employ."

The penetrating power of his words was not confined to the internal situation of his country. Moved by the mounting crisis he saw all around him, the Archbishop acted with prophetic boldness to call our attention as Americans to the impact we have, by policy and practice, on the fate and future of El Salvador. In a personal letter to President Carter on February 17th, he requested that the U.S. not provide military assistance to the Salvadorean government, and that we guarantee that the U.S. would not intervene militarily, economically or diplomatically in the determination of the destiny of the Salvadorean people.

On behalf of the Catholic bishops conference in the United States both Archbishop Quinn, as President, and I, as General Secretary, have publicly reiterated the position of Archbishop Romero this week. We have done so because as Archbishop Quinn said, there is no more fitting tribute we can pay the martyr of San Salvador than to follow the advice he gave us about his own country. It is not sufficient to honor his memory; we also should heed his warning that what is needed from the United States is not more military aid to the government, but a firm commitment to the people of El Salvador that we will respect their right of self-determination and not seek to subordinate their future to any design of our making.

The words and deeds of Oscar Romero marked him as a true shepherd of Medellin and Puebla. Just as those meetings have yielded light and life for the whole church, so his life and death have become a symbol in the church today. His legacy already extends beyond the confines of his own nation. His death undoubtedly will be a source of inspiration to his own people, whom he loved to the end; his life will remain a source of hope for the whole church. The assassin's bullet will not silence the power of his words or his witness. His legacy to the church remains a lesson of the special place of the poor in ministry; of the centrality of social justice to the work

of the church; of the need to be a sign of hope even in the face of conflict and evil.

His legacy is captured in a homily he gave on Palm Sunday two years ago, when he said: "Brothers and Sisters, in the face of these happenings near Holy Week, God's voice, the voice of Christ who redeems, tells us that it is important that we not silence the voice of just demands.... Because, naturally, brothers and sisters, when we stand up for these just aspirations, we are not playing into the hands of terrorist demands. The church is opposed to violence in any form, both that which comes as the fruit of repression, and that which represses in such a barbarous way. The church simply calls for understanding, dialogue, justice and love. These are the forces of the church."

Let us now offer the prayer of the church for this good, holy and courageous shepherd.

*On March 30 Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, attended the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, who was assassinated on March 24. More than three dozen people died and scores were injured when explosions and gunfire broke out in the square in front of the cathedral where the funeral Mass was being celebrated. Following is Archbishop Quinn's account of the tragedy.*

I left San Francisco early on Sunday, March 29. Although I had traveled alone to El Salvador, I arrived at the same time as several other foreign priests and bishops and some representatives of the National Council of Churches from New York. Among the foreign bishops were Bishop Eamon Casey of Galway, Ireland; Auxiliary Bishop James O'Brien of Westminster, England; Bishop William Connare of Greensburg, Pa., and Bishop James Hickey of Cleveland.

On Sunday morning after breakfast we left at 9 o'clock to go to the basilica where the procession formed. It was a hot and sunny morning. The streets were filled with people who seemed relatively subdued, which matched the weather. There was not even the slightest breeze to alleviate the heat, although there was an occasional cloud to give brief relief from the bright sun. At the basilica I met Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas of Santiago de Maria, El Salvador, a bishop from Brazil and another from Ecuador. There were several more there and quite a large crowd in the basilica by the time the procession began to move at 10 a.m. We walked the better part of an hour from the basilica to the cathedral. There we vested for the Mass and took our places on the front steps of the cathedral where the Mass was to be celebrated.

I was standing next to the altar facing the immense crowd of perhaps 100,000 people. Next to me was Archbishop Marcos McGrath of Panama City. The crowd was singing hymns and listening to various instructions

pertinent to the funeral Mass. Directly in front of the altar lay the casket containing the body of Archbishop Romero. It was surrounded by flowers, but on the top rested only a crucifix.

After some 15-minutes' wait, there was applause and cheering from the crowd signaling the arrival of Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada of Mexico City, who had come from Mexico as a special representative of Pope John Paul II. In a few moments the Mass began. During the first reading of the Scriptures I could see a long column of people marching down the right side of the square near the government buildings. They were quiet, but their left hands were raised as they walked. They were a body of leftist organizations and were carrying a wreath to be placed on the coffin. At this point the Boy Scouts, who were in charge of crowd control and who throughout this whole event performed heroically and with consummate skill, closed ranks to prevent the marchers from crossing in front of the area where the altar was set up. Even so there was no disturbance.

One marcher was allowed to go up and place the wreath near the casket. The rest remained at the periphery of the square. The Mass then continued. Following the Gospel, Cardinal Corripio stood at the altar where he best could be seen by the people and where there was a microphone. He was approximately two-thirds through his prepared sermon when suddenly there was a sound of gunfire followed quickly by an explosion at the far right end of the square where the leftist groups had gathered. A sharpshooter had been sighted on top of one of the buildings in the square earlier.

It should be noted that Archbishop Romero was assassinated while he was celebrating Mass and struck down immediately after he had concluded his sermon. Similarly the trouble on Palm Sunday began during the sermon of the cardinal. He had just quoted some of the remarks made by Pope John Paul II at the general assembly of the Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979

and was concluding with the words of Archbishop Romero-- "We cannot love by hating. We cannot defend life by killing"--when the shot rang out.

For a moment there was an effort by the cardinal to bring calm to the crowd. But then a second explosion threw the crowd into panic. There was a great gasp as if to say, "What we feared most to happen has happened." The crowd swayed to the right and to the left for a moment and then broke ranks when someone near the altar said, "into the cathedral." I was only a few steps away from the main door. The crowd began to move toward the door and instantly I was swept along by the force of thousands of people moving in the same direction. Within seconds there were from 5,000 to 6,000 people inside the cathedral. We were packed up against one another as in the old movies of slave ships. It was impossible to move and very difficult for the elderly and children to breath both because of the intense heat and because so many of them are of small stature.

Because of the circumstances and not knowing what might happen, I gave general absolution. A Maryknoll priest near me gave me absolution. We could do nothing to alleviate the situation. We were utterly powerless. Across from where I stood in the huge crowd I could see a large picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I invited the people to join in praying the rosary and we continued to pray throughout the ordeal.

There would be moments of calm and we would think that perhaps the violence was over. Then another bomb would explode or a gunshot would ring through the air. At one point there was a sudden commotion in the crowd toward the front, the side door of the cathedral near the altar. A young girl in a red bandanna came in with a sub-machine gun. But eventually she left and there did not seem to be anyone shot. As we were huddled together in the sweltering heat a corpse would be carried in from outside and brought over to the side wall. This happened

a number of times. There were bodies lying on the front steps of the cathedral. It seemed that most of those who died were trampled or died from asphyxiation.

There were a few telephones inside the cathedral for use by the Red Cross. They were very helpful. So I tried to reach the American embassy in San Salvador hoping to enlist some assistance to restore order and help the crowd. We were unable to make contact, no doubt due to the condition in the city at the moment.

Near the area where the phones were located was the burial place of Archbishop Romero. As the violence continued outside, the casket was carried into the cathedral and placed at once in the tomb. Cardinal Corripio then said the prayers for the burial and the tomb was closed while gunfire and bombs continued to explode outside.

And so the waiting went on and on. We did not know whether someone would throw a bomb into the cathedral itself or sprinkle the crowd with machine gunfire. Still less did we know whether we would be detained as hostages. After some two and a half hours of this uncertainty, word began to circulate among the crowd that the bishops, priests and religious should go out first so that the people would feel that it was safe to leave. The chief targets of the violence were the bishops, priests and religious, and the reasoning was that if they were able to go back into the square without being shot, it would be safe for the people. So we went out together and there was no more shooting.

Who was responsible for this sacrilege, for this insult to humanity, for this unbelievable outrage on Palm Sunday? Government reports from El Salvador first reported a "slight disturbance" during the funeral Mass. The blame was placed on the leftist elements.

The fact, however, is that the leftist elements, which we all saw clearly from the altar where I was standing, were peaceful. The fact is that the first bomb



was thrown at them. Are we to believe that they threw the bomb at themselves? The fact is that having put a wreath on the casket they would not be likely then to disrupt the funeral.

The fact is that the oligarchy and the government seemed to be entirely absent from the funeral. Their presence, it would seem, would be a major reason for leftists to create a disruption and this reason was lacking. A sharpshooter was seen standing on top of one of the government buildings in the square. Security troops were spotted at various points in the city that morning.

The situation is admittedly complex. There is the junta, the oligarchy and the leftist groups. In addition there is the church. The church has a long-standing and well-developed social teaching going back to Leo XIII before the turn of the century and running through the Second Vatican Council, Medellin and Puebla. The latter, it should be remembered, was approved shortly after the final document was submitted to Pope Paul II.

Fairness demands that room be allowed for exceptions, but the oligarchy as a group is extremely, fanatically rightist. It has never accepted the social teaching of the church and resists any effort at improving the situation of the poor of the country.

The junta is weak and while it has made some effort to improve the situation, for example by land reform, it is not strong enough to be in control of the military or of the oligarchy. The oligarchy would like to discredit and bring about the downfall of the junta and so restore its own hegemony.

All of this, in turn, only plays into the hands of the leftist groups who, with some legitimate grounds, can claim that they have no other course and that they are the only organized opposition to the shocking and widespread violation of human dignity and human civil rights.

Archbishop Romero rightly condemned the excesses and violence of all three groups and tried to bring them

to respect human rights, to peace and to order for the sake of the whole nation and all its people. The enemies of Christ said he was a political figure, that he was seeking the crown when he spoke about the kingdom of God. When he worked miracles and fed the hungry or cured the sick, they said he worked in the power of the devil. Similarly when Archbishop Romero spoke about such indisputable biblical points of morality as "thou shall not kill," that every human individual created in the image of God has the right to live in freedom and human dignity with guaranteed civil rights, they said he was "interfering in politics" and that he was a "communist."

This is only another manifestation of the policies of some Latin American governments which use the expression "national security" to justify all forms of repression, including the random murder of citizens. The tactics of such governments are the very tactics we have associated and continue to associate with communist tyranny, tactics which must be denounced wherever they are found.

As Jesus did not let accusations that he was a political figure or in league with the devil deter him, so the bishops and the priests of El Salvador and of other countries will have to accept the ignominy of being called communists if that is necessary to be faithful to their obligation to proclaim the whole truth of the whole Gospel of Christ in all its power and with all its beauty. Rejection and insults are not the criteria of truth. Sometimes they are the lot of those who are faithful to the truth. For ultimately the truth will prevail.

While it is difficult for me as a foreign visitor to El Salvador to make a completely accurate assessment of what happened, what I say and witnessed makes it impossible for me to subscribe to the report that leftists were the cause of the disaster. A civil authority which makes no seeming effort to control a crowd to restore order in such circumstances must at least be suspected of some kind of complicity. A government of a Catholic

country and an oligarchy notably absent from the funeral of its own archbishop must also be suspected of some complicity.

The question then becomes not who is guilty but rather who is most guilty? As I conclude these reflections there come to mind the words of Pope John Paul II on the World Day of Peace:

*"Violence flourishes in lies, and needs lies. It seeks to gain respectability in the eyes of the world by pretexts that have nothing to do with reality and are often contradictory..."*

*"We cannot sincerely condemn recourse to violence unless we engage in a corresponding effort to replace it by courageous political efforts which aim at eliminating threats to peace by attacking the roots of injustice."*

*"This is why I was able to say with such conviction at Drogheda in Ireland and why I now repeat, 'violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Do not believe in violence; do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace and forgiveness and love; for they are of Christ.'"*

*"Truth is the driving power of peace because it reveals and brings about the unity of man with God, with himself and with others. Forgiveness and reconciliation are constitutive elements of the truth which strengthens peace and which builds up peace. To refuse forgiveness and reconciliation is for us to lie and to enter into the murderous logic of falsehood."*

Pope John Paul II, Jan. 1, 1980.

*On April 1, 1980 Father J. Bryan Hehir, USCC Associate Secretary for International Justice and Peace, submitted written testimony on the Administration's Foreign Assistance Appropriations Bill. In oral testimony before the Senate Subcommittee, Mr. Thomas Quigley who was in El Salvador at the time of Archbishop Romero's assassination, said the proposed \$5.7 million in U.S. military aid to El Salvador "has now assumed a symbolic character of immense proportions."*

Thomas E. Quigley  
Advisor for Latin America  
Office for International Justice and Peace  
United States Catholic Conference

REMARKS BEFORE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS  
April 1, 1980

The events of the last eight days in El Salvador are not only highly dramatic and deeply tragic but they offer as well an instructive backdrop against which to view U.S. policy in the region.

Nine days ago I sat in the sanctuary of San Salvador's Sacred Heart Basilica together with other U.S. churchmen and women who had come to express the support of our churches for Archbishop Romero and to learn all we could about the current reality. We -- and it's fair to say most of El Salvador -- heard him preach that morning one of his strongest and most passionate pleas for peace. He begged, pleaded with and finally commanded the Christians within the security forces to stop absolutely all repression, if by no other way than by individually refusing to carry out unjust orders to kill.

The following day an Army spokesman termed the Archbishop's words treasonous and that evening an assassin's bullet ended his life. Archbishop Romero died denouncing the repression that still characterizes the policy of the Salvadorean security forces that run the

country. He asked President Carter to withhold all support that is called military or security, no matter how "non-lethal" the proffered items may be in themselves, because support from our country directly to the military of El Salvador can only strengthen the repressive forces, convincing them further that no matter how reprehensible their actions, they can still count on the friendship of the United States.

The Archbishop asked the United States to condition any economic aid, presumably destined to the well-being of the Salvadorean people, to a reform and cleansing of the country's security forces.

Time and again he insisted that the solution to El Salvador's problem, its massive "institutionalized violence" which allowed the very few to acquire fortunes and forced the very many to live in needless grinding poverty, lay in the areas of radical social and economic reforms, active participation by the organized masses in the political life of the country, and -- as a first step and pre-condition to the success of the others -- bringing the security forces under control.

What has happened since the coup of last October has been the appearance of reform, the still more total exclusion of the organized masses from political life, and the continuation of hard-line military dominance. Instead of "reforms without repression" as the Archbishop repeatedly called for, there has been the appearance of reforms accompanied by repression to the point that the program of the government could almost be described as repression without reform.

El Salvador is right now in one of the most crucial moments of its recent history. If not the whole world, at least much of the Third World and all the peoples of Latin America are looking carefully -- hopefully or fearfully -- at what is transpiring there. And all are looking to see what response is to be made by the country that has so thoroughly overshadowed events in that region for so long, the United States.

Nicaragua -- and not Cuba, we need to be clear about that -- has signalled a new day, and raised new hopes, for all of Central America. El Salvador is not Nicaragua, nor Guatemala, nor Honduras; each has its own unique specificity. But all are sufficiently bound together by ties of the common experience of external domination and internal repression that an event as transcendent as the popular liberation of Nicaragua cannot but alter the perceptions and expectation and demands of neighboring peoples. The reality of El Salvador has been changed; United States policy, to have any success, to be what we proclaim its goals to be, must similarly change.

~~We believe that policy has changed considerably since last July 19, as our proposed testimony indicates. But we are equally convinced, especially in the light of recent, rapidly unfolding events, that it must adapt still further.~~

We have urged in the prepared testimony and press still more urgently today for the United States to extricate itself ~~totally from its present and proposed military relationship with El Salvador.~~ Although relatively small in total amount and largely cleansed of its more objectionable weapons component, the proposed \$5.7 million has now assumed a symbolic character of immense proportions. The Agrarian reform program does not need this equipment; nor do any other hoped-for reforms. The Ministry of Defense with no effective restraints arising from the civilian sector or even from the more progressive elements in the armed forces, is all that stands to benefit from such aid. Not the people of El Salvador, not the future of U.S. relations with this and other countries of the region, and probably not even the still remaining but diminishing democratic, civilian or reformist elements of the present military -- civilian Junta need to have our bilateral relationship defined in military terms. We are grateful that this Committee has devoted special consideration to the Administration's military request and urge that the Committee express at least its concern if not outright disapproval of this program.

Archbishop Romero has become El Salvador's leader for the protection of human rights, for democracy and liberation. He also has become a target for accusations of political meddling as well as for threats to his person. Christian hope in God's fidelity sustains him. A recent visit to Pope John Paul II also encourages his efforts to establish social justice by peaceful means.

"I know all the conditions of your country," said the Pope, "the difficulties of your pastoral task, and I pray every day for El Salvador. There must be a vigorous defense of social justice...but we must exercise care regarding some ideologies that can infiltrate the efforts for human rights."

The archbishop said, "I reassured the Pope that I was trying to steer the Christian basic communities, the priests and religious on the path of the Gospel, so that in the fervor of defending justice and loving the poor, they do not lose sight of the Christian values of our people."

Archbishop Romero wrote a letter to President Jimmy Carter February 17 in which he expressed concern at news reports that the U.S. government is considering military aid to El Salvador.

#### SALVADORAN ARCHBISHOP ASKS CARTER TO END MILITARY AID

In the last few days, news has appeared in the national press that worries me greatly. According to reports, your government is studying the possibility of economic and military support and assistance to the present junta government.

Because you are a Christian and because you have shown that you want to defend human rights, I venture to set forth for you my pastoral point of view concerning this news and to make a request.

I am very worried by the news that the government of the United States is studying a form of abetting the arming of El Salvador by sending military teams and advisors to "train three Salvadoran battallions in logistics, communications and intelligence." If this information from the newspapers is correct, the

contribution of your government, instead of promoting greater justice and peace in El Salvador, will without doubt sharpen the injustice and repression against the organizations of the people who repeatedly have been struggling to gain respect for their most fundamental human rights.

The present junta government and above all the armed forces and security forces unfortunately have not demonstrated their capacity to resolve, in political and structural practice, the grave national problems. In general they have only reverted to repressive violence, producing a total of deaths and injuries much greater than in the recent military regimes whose systematic violation of human rights was denounced by the Inter-American Committee on Human Rights.

The brutal form in which the security forces recently attacked and assassinated the occupiers of the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party in spite of what appears to be the lack of authorization for this operation from the junta government and the party is an indication that the junta and the party do not govern the country, but that political power is in the hands of the unscrupulous military who only know how to repress the people and promote the interests of the Salvadoran oligarchy.

If it is true that last November "a group of six Americans were in El Salvador...providing \$200,000 in gas masks and flak jackets and instructing about their use against demonstrators," you yourself should be informed that it is evident since then that the security forces, with better personal protection and efficiency, have repressed the people even more violently using lethal weapons.

For this reason, given that as a Salvadoran and as archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, I have an obligation to see that faith and justice reign in my country, I ask you, if you truly want to defend human



rights, to prohibit the giving of this military aid to the Salvadoran government. Guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly with military, economic, diplomatic or other pressures to determine the destiny of the Salvadoran people.

At this particular time we are living through a grave economic and political crisis in our country, but it is certain that it is increasingly the people who are awakening and organizing and have begun to prepare themselves to manage and be responsible for the future of El Salvador. Only they are capable of overcoming the crisis.

It would be unjust and deplorable if the intrusion of foreign powers were to frustrate the Salvadoran people, were to repress them and block their political path that our country ought to follow. It would violate a right which we Latin American bishops meeting in Puebla publicly recognized when we said: "The legitimate self-determination of our people that permits them to organize according to their own genius and the march of their history and to cooperate in a new international order."

I hope that your religious sentiments and your feelings for the defense of human rights will move you to accept my petition, avoiding by this action worse bloodshed in this suffering country.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C 20005

March 12, 1980

Dear Archbishop Romero:

On the anniversary of the death of the revered Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., I write to acknowledge receipt of a copy of your letter of February 17, 1980 to President Carter urging the United States not to provide military assistance to the Salvadorean government.

Our Conference, as you know from previous communications, has been following the developments in El Salvador closely. We are aware of the courageous, indeed prophetic, positions you have taken during this time of great suffering and struggle for the people of El Salvador. I am writing at this time to endorse your position opposing U.S. military assistance to the present government, and to tell you that we will be doing all we can through the U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington to see that your advice to the President is followed.

In December 1979, Mr. Thomas Quigley, the Latin America Adviser at the Conference, testified before the U.S. Congress opposing military aid to the junta. Later this month we expect to be able to testify again; we will surely rely upon your letter and join our voice with it in warning against the provision of military assistance by our government at this time.

We will continue to follow events in your nation with care. We are available in these difficult days to cooperate through our activity in the United States in the efforts of the Church in El Salvador to bring justice and peace to your nation. Our prayers and best wishes are with you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most. Reverend John R. Quinn  
Archbishop of San Francisco  
President, NCCB/USCC

Most Reverend Oscar Romero y Galdamez  
Archbishop of San Salvador  
Arzobispado  
1 Calle Pte. 3042  
San Salvador, El Salvador

*Only hours before the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 24, Bishop Thomas Kelly, general secretary of the United States Catholic Conference, wrote to the chairman of the House Foreign Operations subcommittee asking him to take action against military aid.*

I write to request that you and the members of the foreign operations subcommittee oppose the provision of U.S. military assistance to the present government in El Salvador.

This position of the U.S. Catholic Conference has been formulated in light of the extraordinary step taken by Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador. On February 17, he addressed a personal plea to President Carter asking him, in the name of human rights, to "prohibit the giving of military aid to the Salvadorean government," and to the guarantee that the United States would not "intervene, directly or indirectly, with military, economic, diplomatic or other pressures to determine the destiny of the Salvadorean people."

By this letter I wish to echo the archbishop's plea, this time from within the church in the United States. The position of our Conference is taken because of the information coming to us from the church in El Salvador. Rather than a view of a beleaguered government caught between extremists of left and right, the picture we receive is that the military arm of government in El Salvador is itself an instrument of terror and repression, quite unable to win the political support needed to govern in peace.

It is for this reason that I commend respectfully for consideration Archbishop Romero's position that the United States not provide any military assistance to the government in El Salvador.

*On January 6, 1980, feast of the Epiphany, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero delivered a sermon in the cathedral of San Salvador. A few days previously he had acted as coordinator for a meeting in the seminary, after which the two civilian members of the five-man ruling Junta resigned. The Junta, a gesture to prevent civil war, was installed in October 1979 after a bloodless coup which overthrew President Carlos Humberto Romero (no relation to the archbishop). Thirty-eight civilians in government also resigned. After a brief introduction, the archbishop launched into his frank comments on the current situation.*

SALVADORAN ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO'S EPIPHANY SERMON  
(Tape recording of sermon. Translated by Tabor House,  
Washington, D.C. January 1980.)

...Is there no longer any hope? What will happen to the Agrarian Reform process already begun? Will the new Cabinet continue to carry it out? Will the new Minister of Agriculture make it his primary objective? Or will he be frightened by threats as when they machine-gunned the home of Dom Enrique Alvarez, the ex-minister, which incidentally was never reported in any newspaper. What will happen to the nationalization of coffee and sugar exports?

Above all, what will occur regarding the abolition of ORDEN. Will it continue to be active? or will it rise again under another name, as one General announced? Actually it has continued to function and lately with the backing of a certain National Guard unit, has stepped up its attacks. What will happen with the problem that suffocates the life of the people, the problem of the disappeared and the political prisoners?

We are in anguish too, when the Investigative Commission says that it is rushing to finish a report "since in the light of recent events the mission entrusted to us now has no official backing. Because of that we have felt it important to finish our work as soon as possible and declare the Commission dissolved."

It is always the people who are left in their distress. Despite all that is happening I state that as a person of faith I believe a new path of salvation will appear. I want to hold out this hope to all those of good will who are listening to me. I believe that these events, these questions, already delineate our pastoral directions.

First, we must preserve the process of the liberation of our people. The people understand the process which has already cost them so much blood and we dare not draw back. We can overcome the present crisis by completing the process. We take a cue from today's gospel and ask "What is the star that must guide the people, the government and the different sectors of society?" How can we make sure that this search for social justice does not come to a halt, does not fade away, but that it keeps moving ahead?

Next, I address the ministers of the government, the Junta, which is presently together with the Armed Forces, the ruling force in El Salvador. There must be a greater clarity regarding your objectives. The duty of all authority is to be a moral force which forges the different groups to work together for the common good, respecting the freedom and the plurality of the people.

I wish to remind the government that at this time there is a choice between two axes to achieve unity. One is the Armed Forces and the desire to direct everything to maintain the Armed Forces. This is not an authentic goal for the people. The other axis is that of the common good. There is a call for unity in the popular organizations. If this responds to what the people yearn for then indeed we ought to join forces to save our people.

I speak now to the cabinet ministers and other functionaries who resigned. You were accused of being hasty; of having acted emotionally, of having been caught off guard by political maneuvering based on greed for

power. I wish to say that we must thank you for your service and for placing your talents at the service of the process.

To judge the actions of these individuals we would need to search their consciences, something only they can do. Personally I believe the statements they made in resigning from their posts. It was a gesture of loyalty to leave room for the government to make a better choice. But they have all agreed that they can no longer go on working in a situation where there is a parallel government, where both reforms and clubs are used, where there is a perversion of the original process.

These men reaffirm their wish for changes within a democratic and peaceful process. The resignation of high-level people such as Guillermo Manuel Ungo and Roman Mayorga Quiroz has the approval of many, even those who for a long time had accused them of being traitors. Now they see them as men of integrity. I want to confirm my judgment of them from the beginning. Theirs was an honest and sincere involvement. They were convinced that because they are honest they would not be manipulated and that at the appropriate time they would know how to say no. I thank them for this proof.

Their resignation offers a hope that should stimulate the government to seek an honest solution. For the sake of honesty and as a sign that he is concerned for the common good, the Secretary of Defense should also resign. His continuance, besides giving a bad image of the government to the outside world, is also an obstruction within the government itself.

I respect--I repeat--I respect the decision taken by the ministers who indeed make their judgment from inside the government. We can make our judgment from outside but they have lived the past two months and their inside judgment is a clear call that the people ought not to be deceived. This is, the government is called upon to support the people in their struggles. They

should not feel that they have failed but they should strategize to revert to the demands of the process of the people.

To the Armed Forces: beneath the many reactions of the Armed Forces to the civilian populace lies an exaggerated idolatry of the institution of the Armed Forces. One must take note, my dear friends in the military, that every institution including the military must be at the service of the people. It is the common good that must shape the structure and the regulations of any institution. Every institution must undergo changes insofar as the good of the people demands. Absurd consideration of seniority and hierarchy must not drown the aspirations of the people.

We say the same regarding laws and codes which become outdated, rigid and senseless. There must be adaptability to the times in which we live and to the needs of the people we serve. Unselfish service of the people with real changes in structures will bring about that unity called for by the Armed Forces. As long as there exist other temptations and rightist tendencies in the Armed Forces, evil tradition will permit the oligarchy to run the army to defend their interests against the interests of the people. A supposed unity resulting from that remains a myth.

I am convinced that within the Armed Forces there are noble, sincere, and just men who can rise above these temptations, who can be loyal to the people rather than exclusively to their institution. It is not enough to proclaim innocence about abuse of power. We want to see action. However the actions we see now are repression and manipulation by the oligarchy.

Our office of Legal Defense has received many complaints. It is necessary to continue denunciations on behalf of human rights. On December 29 military units of the Army, the National Guard, police and forces of "order" invaded the districts of El Terrero, Conacaste, San Jose, El Amatillo and other districts in Las Vueltas



in the state of Chalatenango. Leftist groups have killed ex-members of ORDEN and this revenge is condemnable. Equally condemnable is a security operation which goes beyond any defense requirement. The above military occupation lasted until December 31 after having killed many campesinos, including a child of two and another of eight. They took them to some unknown place; they destroyed dwellings of several campesinos; they killed their pigs and other domestic animals, and finally robbed their corn, beans and clothes.

We demand an investigation of these actions, a sanction for those responsible and liberty for those arrested. Because of this defense of the National Guard, there was a tragic score of wounded and dead. Also in the parish of Divine Providence in Tlacatch a convent door was needlessly broken down and the home of the priests searched.

A word to the popular political organizations and to the military: you are the social and political forces. On other occasions I have quoted the Medellin text which states that the people must organize to press for those actions which the government in many cases cannot carry out without the popular backing. I think that the organizations, as I have always insisted in my pastoral letters, are a right of the people who must seek ways of participating in the political process.

Therefore I want to repeat the call that I have made: not to abuse the people's right to organize, to measure your tactics and strategies according to the common good, never to act in revenge or to make an idol of your organization. I have repeated these things many times right here in this cathedral. Today a call to attempt a dialogue is of great relevance. I wish that every organization moved by the desire for the people's liberation would participate in a frank dialogue with all people of good will.

You have seen evidence of sincerity in some men of government. I think that this invites us to be less

dogmatic. Let us learn how to open ourselves to a capacity for dialogue out of love for our beloved people ...and of the people in general who are not on the extreme right nor extreme left. Regarding this I want to congratulate the people who despite their need for social backing, did not seek support from groups promoting violence and madness.

Our people have good sense. Our people know how to discern the difference between a false redemption and a true one. They put their hope in those who offer them true liberation. That is why I call on all those who form this enormous sector between the two extremes urging them to seek a suitable stance for participating in the common political task of our people. May they reflect in the light of the Word and discover their mission. Now is the time for our people to carry out this task. They must create new initiatives. A simple adaptation of the old will not do.

Christian inspiration can carry our deeply Christian people on to new paths. In this I am simply doing what Medellin recommends: conscientizing my people on the need to organize and participate so that our people may not be mere passive spectators but rather authors of their own destiny. I believe that those who truly wish to govern for the common good must count on the participation of our noble Salvadoran people. They must not use their names as a way of climbing into power and then neglect the people whom they must serve through government.

Finally a call to the oligarchy. I repeat what I said at another time, please do not consider me an enemy. I am simply a shepherd, a brother, a friend of these people--one who knows their suffering, their hunger, their anguish. It is in the name of those voices that I raise my voice to say, do not idolize your wealth! Do not hoard it to let the rest die of hunger! Share so that that you may be happy.

Cardinal Lorscheider shared a very graphic lesson with me. We must know how to strip ourselves of our

rings so that they won't cut off our fingers. I think that is a very illustrative expression. Whoever isn't willing to do without rings, risks losing a hand. Anyone unwilling to give out of love and social justice makes it necessary that luxuries be taken away by violence.

We have a denunciation of specific abuse to make today. On January 3 the workers of two companies, Rival, S.A. and Futesa, S.A., were advised that the company could no longer continue to operate. As a consequence more than a hundred families were to be left without employment or benefits. I know that the owners could keep them open. They don't need to pull in profits as in the best of times. Why can't they put something of the profits from former days and share the common sacrifice that is required in the present crisis of Salvador's history, so that these people may survive? So that hunger and misery may be alleviated and that they get energy to search for a more long-term solution?

Like Jerusalem at the time of Christ's birth, our country too is disturbed. Government and people are disturbed about the future. But as a church of hope we, in imitation of the Wise Men, know that somewhere, He is there. We have indicated ways in which those experienced in the political sphere must follow if they would find true liberation for our people. I say to all sectors in the country: Make way for Jesus Christ! Let the King of Peace come in! Submit before Him with the humility of the Wise Men, seeking Him and then we will find the solution. This is the meaning for the Salvadoran people on the feast of Epiphany. God has called us for salvation and happiness and He cannot mislead us. But He does ask us to be detached (from our wealth and position), to seek Him, to be humble, to consult others and be capable of giving up even what we most love so that we may find what is most precious--the Lord and the happiness of our people. Amen!

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE  
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Most Rev. John R. Quinn  
Archbishop of San Francisco  
President

May 21, 1979

Mons. Oscar Arnulfo Romero  
Arzobispo de San Salvador  
Casa Arzobispal  
San Jose de la Montana  
San Salvador  
EL SALVADOR

Dear Archbishop Romero:

It was a privilege for me to be with you during the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla, Mexico earlier this year. The esteem in which you are held by your brother bishops is a testimony to your ministry. One sign of that respect was the open letter sent to you by forty of the bishops at Puebla.

In this letter I wish to make my own all the sentiments of esteem, encouragement and support that are communicated in the letter from Puebla.

As I write this I am mindful of the events of two years ago this month, when no fewer than ten priests in El Salvador were threatened, beaten, tortured or expelled and one, Father Alfonso Navarro, was assassinated. Those events prompted my predecessor as President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, to issue a clear statement condemning the persecution of the Church in El Salvador and expressing the support of the Church in the United States for "the whole people of God in El Salvador who struggle and suffer for justice, reconciliation and peace."

Unfortunately, justice, reconciliation and peace seem as elusive today as two years ago. New acts of aggression against the poor and those who side with the poor have continued and each year has witnessed a new martyr from the ranks of the clergy. The litany of recent events, ranging from the subtle harassment of the Church through interference with your radio broadcast to such acts of wanton cruelty as the shooting of a score of peaceful demonstrators on the steps of the Metropolitan Cathedral, moves us once again to express our deepest sympathy with our suffering brothers and sisters in El Salvador and our fervent prayer that their suffering may soon be rewarded with justice.

We pledge our every effort to do what we can in this country to hasten the resolution of this most painful situation and we send to you our assurances of prayer and warmest greetings.

In the Risen Lord,

S/  
Most Rev. John R. Quinn  
President NCCB/USCC

*On July 6, 1977, Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati and president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement deploring the persecution of the Catholic Church in El Salvador. Right wing groups had issued death threats against the 47 Jesuits if they did not leave by July 20 (they did not leave); 15 foreign priests were expelled; several Salvadorean priests and catechists were arrested and some were forced into exile. Two Salvadorean priests, Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., and Father Alfonso Navarro, were assassinated. Following is the text of Archbishop Bernardin's statement.*

It is now nine years since the bishops of Latin America ratified the Church's evangelical commitment to the poor and oppressed of their continent in the historic meeting of Medellin. The life of the Church in Latin America since that time has illustrated, more dramatically than any documents could, the meaning of this commitment in the daily struggle of the Christian people.

Each year has witnessed new chapters in the fidelity of the Church in Latin America to the gospel's imperative of love, service, and liberation.

The Medellin conference was hardly over and its proposals had barely begun to be implemented, when one of the smallest of the hemisphere's republics, El Salvador, engaged in a tragic war with its neighbor, Honduras. The root causes of that conflict--landlessness, high unemployment, and the failure of national plans to redress these great inequities--persist to this day in both countries.

Just two years ago, peasant groups in Honduras and the Church's pastoral agents working with them attempted to petition their government to implement the already passed land reform act. Their non-violent demonstrations were met with massive repression, resulting in the deaths of several people, including an American priest, Father Casimir Cypher, O.F.M. Conv. In the name of our bishops' conference I addressed that issue in a statement on human rights in Honduras in September, 1975.

In El Salvador today the situation is even more dramatic. The lines have been drawn sharply between, on the one hand, the landless peasants and the ministers of the Church at every level--from bishops to local lay catechists (Delegates of the Word of God)--and, on the other, the national security forces and the landed oligarchy.

The past year has been a time of intense conflict, reaching peaks of bloody violence in February of this year after the national elections and again in May.

Throughout this entire period another form of violence and repression, less bloody but no less vicious, has been carried on through the press in the form of a campaign of slander and calumny against the Church, and through government agencies in the form of arrests, expulsions, or exiling of Salvadorean and foreign priests.

The position of the Church has been eminently clear. In numerous statements from the episcopal conference and from the Archbishop of San Salvador, in meetings with the governmental authorities, in public services in the cathedral and elsewhere, the Church has sought tirelessly to foster a climate of peace and reconciliation in which violence and hatred could be overcome.

But at the same time the Church has remained absolutely steadfast in its collective determination to preach the gospel in all its integrity to all the people. The Church's essential and inescapable mission, that of evangelization, involves "the duty of proclaiming the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children--the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete." (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30)

None of this, as Pope Paul has insisted, is foreign to the mission of the Church. "Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves

an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development--a message especially energetic today about liberation." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 29)

In few other countries today has the Church's pastoral ministry been met with such intense and organized opposition as in El Salvador. The tiny majority of rich and powerful, zealous guardians of a sterile and unjust status quo, have not hesitated to employ every means at their disposal to obstruct the preaching of the gospel. Fifteen foreign priests, three of them from the United States, have been expelled; several Salvadorean priests and catechists have been arrested, two have been forced into exile, and others are prohibited from returning to their parishes. And two Salvadorean priests, Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., and Father Alfonso Navarro, have been brutally assassinated.

I am confident that the sufferings of the Salvadorean Church will hasten the coming of the kingdom of justice and peace that has been promised by the Lord. I send this expression of fraternal solidarity to our brother bishops of El Salvador, to all the clergy and religious, especially the members of the Society of Jesus who have been singled out for special persecution, and to the whole People of God in El Salvador who struggle and suffer for justice, reconciliation, and peace.



HOUSE SUB-COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS

TESTIMONY BY:

Thomas E. Quigley  
Adviser for Latin America

Office of International Justice and Peace  
United States Catholic Conference

July 21, 1977

Mr. Chairman, my name is Thomas Quigley. I am adviser for Latin American Affairs in the Office of International Justice and Peace of the United States Catholic Conference. I am grateful for the opportunity of joining with other colleagues this afternoon in presenting testimony on the condition of human rights in El Salvador, with particular reference to the persecution of the church.

Two weeks ago, the President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a strongly worded statement of solidarity with the persecuted church and people of El Salvador. Archbishop Bernardin's statement briefly sketched the source of the present turmoil and the basis for the Church's role within that highly conflicted situation.

In simplest form, there are two distinct realities, two sets of historic factors which must be understood. One is the nature of Salvadorean society, especially during the past decade: the smallest of the small Central American republics with the highest population density; a heavily agricultural economy in which the great majority of the rural people have no land of their own and a few wealthy families control vast areas of the arable land.

El Salvador, designated to be one of the showcases of the Alliance for Progress, did experience economic growth during the 60's but because this growth was not accompanied by significant increase in the distribution of wealth among the various sectors and failed particularly to achieve an essential land reform, the lot of the vast majority has continued to deteriorate.

The other reality that must be understood, however schematically, is that of the Catholic Church in today's Latin America. No student of the area is unaware of the historic assembly of Latin American bishops at Medellin, Colombia in the Fall of 1968. Medellin symbolizes the renewed commitment of the Latin American church to the essentially evangelical task of preaching the Good News of liberation, of salvation, to the poor. The Gospel is not to be preached in a vacuum but within the concrete context of people's lives. At Medellin the bishops analyzed the situation of their continent and concluded that what most needed to be addressed were the "structures of domination" that kept millions of people in virtual servitude, the systemic injustices that the bishops characterized as "institutionalized violence" and "situations of sin."

The effects of Medellin were profoundly felt in virtually every country of Latin America and while El Salvador did not experience some of the more dramatic expressions of this renewal such as the various priests movements arising in other countries, the whole church of El Salvador gradually underwent a profound conscientization. Priests, religious and teams of lay catechists called Delegates of the Word of God carried on programs of prayer, study and reflection throughout the rural areas as well as in the cities.

These church personnel, contrary to allegations by the government and the landowners, neither incited nor led the campesinos in their struggles. Instances abound of attempts by the parish priests, including the martyred

Jesuit, Father Rutilio Grande, to contain the justifiable anger and frustration of the peasants, to help them press for their rights in as non-violent a fashion as possible. The campesinos are their own leaders; the priests, including especially the Jesuits, served principally to help the people to reflect on and articulate their needs.

But confrontation with the authorities, aligned as they are with a traditionalist oligarchy determined to retain its privileged position, was inevitable. In 1974, for example, the bishops strongly protested the killing of several campesinos by the national guard in San Vicente. When a few months later in the same area the local pastor was arrested, beaten and tortured, the bishops invoked the penalty of excommunication on all responsible. Further killings occurred in July of that year (1975), bringing about stronger protests from the church and accusations by the government that the church was a haven for communists and that priests were encouraging demonstrations such as those protesting the Miss Universe contest.

By July of last year, however, the scene was set for a more intense and systematic confrontation. It was just a year ago that the government announced a very modest land reform program, the Transformacion Agraria. This program was so reformist and minimalist that parts of the campesino movements refused to support it, but the Jesuits at the Catholic University and through their influential journal, Estudios Centroamericanos, lent their full support; if skeptical of the government's intention, they could at least praise the hoped-for results.

They had little opportunity to do so. The oligarchy organized such strong opposition to the Transformacion Agraria that by October the government backed down and cancelled the program. Among those siding with the land-owners against the government was the government's official (PCN) presidential candidate, Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero, now president.

The accusations especially against the Jesuits and the Archbishop began increasing around the end of the year so that the past six or seven months in El Salvador have been a time of such vicious, sustained, cowardly and systematic attacks upon the church itself as to be probably unparalleled in recent times.

You have heard today in the testimony of others and can read in the documentation we are asking to be received for the record the dramatic litany of these attacks: the arrests and expulsions, the bombings and threats, the beatings and killings of scores, some say hundreds, of campesinos.

These are attacks against the Church, and against religion as such, in at least two distinct ways. The first is the obvious attack against the institutions of the Church and its personnel: the beatings, arrests, expulsions and killings of priests; the printed attacks against the Archbishop of San Salvador and the episcopal conference; the bombings of the Catholic University and the archdiocesan printing house, the threatened assassination of the entire Jesuit community.

The second, less obvious but no less insidious, is the denial not only of the social doctrine of the church but of the freedom of Christians to exercise their faith in accordance with that doctrine. Under the guise of defending a supposed Christian civilization, those in power in El Salvador both reject the church's authoritative teaching and prohibit others from living out their faith in everyday life.

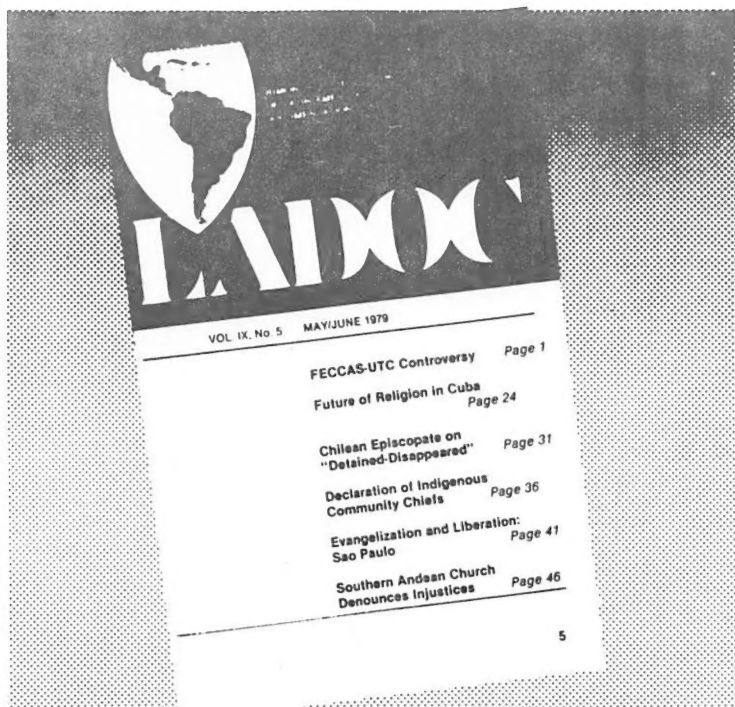
On Sunday, June 12, together with several thousand others I participated in a solemn mass of reparation in the metropolitan cathedral in San Salvador. The service of reparation, not the first of its kind, was held to atone for the sacrileges committed by the security forces when they raided Aguilaes May 19 and 20, broke open the tabernacle of the church and strewed consecrated hosts over the floor. While the obvious focus of the reparation service, held on one of the church's principal

Eucharistic feasts, Corpus Christi, was this wanton desecration of the sacrament in Aguilares, the prayers and the archbishop's sermon made it abundantly clear that the "Santissimo" that had been violated was also the sacredness of the human person, the men, women and children of Aguilares.

That the church is defending the rights of the campesinos as sacred rights; or that the bishops can say as they did in their message of May 20 that "the fate of these campesino compatriots of ours, the poorest of the poor, concerns us as much as or more than the injustice suffered by the expelled priests" is apparently too difficult for the wealthy and powerful to understand.

But they will have to understand that the church in El Salvador is profoundly united and fully committed to its evangelical mission which includes, as Pope Paul has expressed it, "the duty of proclaiming the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children--the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete."

And they will have to understand too that the church in the United States as well as in many other countries is committed to doing everything possible to ensure the freedom, the peace and the well-being of our fellow Christians in El Salvador.



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Salvador--Catholic Church--Addresses,  
essays, lectures. 2. Romero, Oscar A.,  
(Oscar Arnulfo), 1917-1980. I. Series

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